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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SAO PAULO 000619

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - TO ADD PARA MARKING

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SUBJECT: Sao Paulo Opinion Split on Honduras

REF: BRASILIA 1210; (08) SAO PAULO 497

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CLASSIFIED BY: David C. Brooks, State, State, POL; REASON: 1.4(D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Sao Paulo pundits and politicians are strongly split on Brazil's role in Honduras. Mainstream academic experts in this generally pro-PSDB state criticized Brazil's shielding of Zelaya as adventurist, counter-productive and contradictory of the country's traditional policy of non-intervention. Workers Party (PT) contacts, in contrast, strongly defended the Lula government's decision to shelter Zelaya. They argue that permitting Zelaya's overthrow to go unchallenged would have a domino effect, putting at risk other left-oriented regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala and thereby endangering the PT's social democratic (i.e. non-Chavez) vision for Latin America. Evidently, at least some in the PT ranks now see democratically-elected, left-oriented Central American regimes as junior allies to be protected. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) This cable resulted from a wide range of interviews with foreign policy experts and Workers Party (PT) contacts, including: University of Sao Paulo Professor Jose Augusto Guilhon de Albuquerque; Felipe DbAvila and Rogerio Schmitt of the Center for Leadership Training; Professors Marcus Freitas and Gunther Rudzit of the Armando Alvares Penteado Foundation (FAAP); General Alberto Santos Cruz of the Brazilian Army; PT founder and Sao Paulo City Council member Jose Americo; and PT State Deputy Rui Falcao.

The Critics: Brazil is Dancing to Chavez's Tune

¶3. (C) All the critics (Albuquerque, DbAvila, Schmitt, Freitas, Rudzit and Santos Cruz) thought that Hugo Chavez had set the agenda for Brazil in Honduras. Most believed that Zelaya's September 23 appearance at the Brazilian Embassy in Tegucigalpa had taken the GOB by surprise. Moreover, they viewed Zelaya's subsequent use of the Embassy as a base of operation to provoke demonstrations in his favor as contradicting Brazil's longstanding policy of non-intervention. This also completely undercut the GOB's credibility as a mediator, leaving Brazil with less flexibility, they concluded.

A Slide Into Greater Intervention

¶4. (SBU) Professor Albuquerque was more subtle than most critics, noting that President Lula's predecessor, PSDB President

Fernando Henrique Cardoso, also tried to influence his neighbors politics. Brazil, Albuquerque stated, blocked a coup against President Wasmosy of Paraguay in 1996 and pressured President Fujimori to resign in Peru in 2000. These moves, though representing a departure from strict non-intervention, were low profile, supported mid-term negotiated solutions and clearly had the object of preserving democracy as their goal. The Lula administration has changed this logic, becoming an open protagonist for Zelaya, a man whose democratic credentials are questionable. This may work well in the short term, Albuquerque said, but if the policy proves costly, Brazilian public opinion could react against it. Brazil, unlike the other BRICs, has suffered no threats to its borders and, consequently, there is no popular consensus to support costly foreign interventions.

PT Reps Defend the Policy as Principle, Zelaya as bFamilyb

15. (SBU) PT reps Rui Falcao and Jose Americo both stated flatly that, even though the GOB was likely bset upb by Chavez, a PT government had to defend Zelaya as a matter of principle. As a party whose leaders had suffered under a former military regime, the Lula administration could not turn its back on Zelaya. Had it done so, the party's base would have reacted strongly. Americo, in particular, acknowledged that Zelaya's own record had its blemishes, but he countered by saying that Zelaya was like a bad son-in-law, though he might cause trouble, he was still bfamilyb and the PT was obliged to come to his aid.

Honduras is Not the Point

16. (SBU) Beyond family ties, Falcao and Americo both argued

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Honduras as a possible tipping point for Central America. The PT has a bsocial democraticb (i.e. non-Chavez) vision for Latin America, and Zelaya's successful overthrow could have undermined two other key elected Central American leaders who fit into this: Mauricio Funes in El Salvador and Alvaro Colom in Guatemala. (Note: Americo noted several connections between El Salvador's President Funes and Brazil. He reminded Poloff that Funes' spouse is Brazilian and a member of the PT, said that Funes had visited Sao Paulo in August, and described how Funes had recently promoted a certain Colonel DbAvila in the Salvadoran Army, bumping him up over several other officers. This last, if correct, suggested a rather surprising level of detailed knowledge of Salvadoran politics for a state-level Brazilian politician. End Note.) Both PT reps stated that Funes and Colom had won recent elections by narrow margins. If Zelaya's deposition had remained unopposed, the U.S.-trained armies in their countries might have felt tempted to try something similar. The PT reps saw this as possible even under President Obama because, in their view, the Pentagon has its own agenda. Americo justified the vigorous defense of Zelaya, saying that bdespite the good intentions of President Obama and Secretary Clinton, the Pentagon apparatus can enforce its own agenda in the region, and so a vigorous defense of Zelaya was required.

Comment:

17. (C) Foreign Policy does not rate highly on the list of most Brazilians' concerns. As such, the GOB can generally do what it wants in places like Honduras, so long as there are no significant economic or human costs to the policy. PT insiders' notions of Central American dominoes could be significant. While some dose of anti-Pentagon paranoia figured in their statements, it is clear that at least for some in the PT base, Brazil should act as a patron for democratically elected left-oriented regimes in Central America, a region that, heretofore, has lain outside Brazil's traditional sphere of influence.
White